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University Update - January 2019

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Recommended Citation

Comerford, John, "University Update - January 2019" (2019). *University Updates & Communications from the University President*. 47.

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OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT

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January 11, 2019

Dear Colleagues,

Welcome back! The break was welcome, but I am certainly happy to see a full and active campus again. It is really a blessing to be able to enjoy your work environment every day.

Enrollment

We are not yet at the official “census day,” but at this point spring undergraduate enrollment stands at 2,331, which is 22 higher than last spring. We are welcoming 56 new transfer students, which is 8% higher than last spring. Graduate headcount is 381, down 48 from last spring. We will share retention information after census day.

Undergraduate applications for next fall are at 2,447, down about 4%. If you take out the Theatre and Dance applications (which have a different admissions process), we’re down about 2%.

The applicant pool is stronger, with a 6% increase in students with an ACT of 27 to 36 and a 9% increase in 24-26 ACTs. That is good, but also means those students will have more options and greater aid offers from other schools.

We are also seeing significant growth from lower income students, with 33 more applications (15%). This can likely be attributed to our Opportunity Scholarship program.

Finally, for first year students, it is early, but there continue to be encouraging signs in the numbers of students who have already committed. We have 41, which is a 40% increase. Let’s hope that keeps up!

Graduate summer applications are up by 4%, fall applications by 10%. Again, it is still early in all our processes and we are at the stage where engagement is key. If you have a chance to interact with prospective students, please take it! Look for the red bags carried on campus tours.

United Methodist Church

Otterbein was founded by the Evangelical United Brethren Church, which merged with the Methodist Church in 1967 to form the United Methodist Church. We have been affiliated with the United Methodist Church ever since.

In the 1970s, the Church amended its Book of Discipline to take a stand that homosexuality was against church teaching. There is now a movement to remove the discriminatory language from the Church’s governing documents and there will be a special international conference at the end of February where this will be considered.

I just returned from a meeting of presidents of United Methodist affiliated colleges and universities and helped to craft a statement (attached) encouraging the Church to end this discrimination. Otterbein's mission and values are not aligned with the Church's current policy.

The Mission and Values Committee will host a town hall on Wednesday, February 6 at 4:00 p.m. in the chapel to share details about the situation and take feedback on how Otterbein ought to participate in or react to the Church's eventual decision.

Campus Center

We are all excited about the \$17.7 million plan to revitalize our Campus Center. You may recall, the plan is to take \$10 million in new debt and fund raise the remainder. By mid-January, we need to decide whether to begin this project this summer so we have been working towards lead donor gifts for the Center.

Despite our hard work, several of our potential lead donors are unable to make commitments at this moment. We have several proposals outstanding and are encouraging donors to let us know quickly. But without a major commitment in the next few weeks, we will be unable to proceed with the project this summer. We would delay the start until we have secured gifts necessary to help fund the project with the hope to begin in the summer of 2020.

Corporate Partnerships

Otterbein has received accolades for our work with corporate partners in The Point. It has become a central point of recognition as I travel around, especially in Central Ohio. I continue to believe pairing a strong liberal arts (as in broad, not just certain disciplines) education with applied practice with real employers gives Otterbein an area of distinction and advantage in the marketplace.

With The Point almost entirely leased out and largely up-and-running, we will be shifting Erin Bender's duties from Executive Director of The Point to a campus-wide focus on corporate partnerships. She will be visiting with academic departments and the broader campus community to look for ways that we can create win-win-win opportunities – good for our corporate partners, good for our students and academic programs, and good for Otterbein. A cross-functional team will be established to ensure we are coordinating efforts across campus. Erin will also join the President's Cabinet (she has always reported to the President) to ensure we are focused on this area of distinction.

Only Otterbein

Members of the campus community gathered in December in Roush to celebrate the launch of our new branding campaign *Only Otterbein*. Already, billboards are going up in the Central Ohio area and we are receiving very positive feedback. In addition, our integrated marketing plan is being implemented to include radio, social media, and ads in Ohio newspapers with much more to come. I want to thank our marketing and communications team for their creativity and good work in developing this campaign that will be a complement to our new admissions materials coming out this winter and spring.

Governor

Knowing that outgoing Governor John Kasich is a Westerville native, I reached out to him about his plans after his term ends. My hope was that he would agree to play some role at Otterbein. This could benefit students, as they interact with a former Governor and House Budget Committee Chair. It would also be a

major PR opportunity for Otterbein, as we would beat-out other colleges chasing him and benefit from his national profile.

I am pleased to say that the Governor and his staff have been receptive, and we are optimistic that he will call Otterbein home. He would not draw a salary or be employed by Otterbein. He would base his work and national media exposure from Otterbein and we would give him space for an office.

No doubt there are some on campus who might not like his politics or specific policies, but many former politicians have landed on college campuses to the benefit of both. Let's hope we can make this happen! It would be a big win for Otterbein.

Again, welcome back and thanks for all you continue to do for our students!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John Comerford", written in a cursive style.

John Comerford, Ph.D.
President